

nuclear watch new mexico

WATCHDOG

news that bites back



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DISARMAMENT = No New Bomb Factories OR, HOW TO DESERVE THAT NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

President Obama has just accepted a Nobel Peace Prize awarded in large part for his *intent* to eliminate nuclear weapons, even though he has said that may not happen in his lifetime. In his acceptance speech he said, "In the middle of the last century, nations agreed to be bound by a treaty

whose bargain is clear: all will have access to peaceful nuclear power; those without nuclear weapons will forsake them; and those with nuclear weapons will work toward disarmament. I am committed to upholding this treaty. It is a centerpiece of my foreign policy."



He is talking about the 1970 NonProliferation Treaty, for which a Review Conference will be held at the United Nations in New York City this next

May--at which the non-weapons states are expected to intensify their demands that the nuclear powers disarm. Why **can't** we get rid of nuclear weapons in our lifetimes?

Last month a prestigious independent panel named JASON found that the **operational lifetimes of existing U.S. nuclear weapons can be extended for decades through current Life Extension Programs (LEPs)**. Their key findings were: "JASON finds no evidence that accumulation of changes incurred from aging and LEPs have increased risk to certification of today's deployed nuclear warheads" and "Lifetimes of today's nuclear warheads could be extended for decades, with no anticipated loss in confidence..." Bottom line: we can far more than adequately maintain our existing stockpile, and NOT produce new-design nuclear weapons in order to maintain it, while we actively work toward verifiable global nuclear disarmament.

These findings seriously undermine the self-interested arguments made by the Los Alamos and Sandia nuclear weapons labs in NM and Livermore in CA that new designs are needed, in part to win future ratification of the long-hoped-for Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). How ironic! The original aim of the Test Ban Treaty (sought by every U.S. president since Eisenhower, except for W.) was

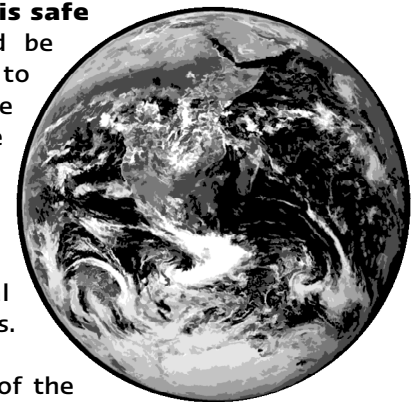
to cut off the further advancement of nuclear weapons. Now America's nuclear weapons complex believes it can produce new-design H-bombs without full-scale testing, given its newly acquired supercomputers for simulating testing, and costly new "Stockpile Stewardship" facilities. Still, they seek yet more taxpayer dollars for expensive new nuclear weapons facilities that are simply not needed, and seek to require them through "Safeguards" they believe the Senate will attach to the CTBT during ratification.

Nuclear Watch has long argued for "**Curatorship**" in which existing warheads are maintained as close as possible to their original designs so as not to introduce changes that could affect reliability. In other words, **if it ain't broke, don't fix it.**

In 2004 Nuclear Watch asked Sen. Jeff Bingaman to require independent review of plutonium pit "trigger" lifetimes. Accordingly, a groundbreaking JASON study released in 2006 found that pits last for 85 years or more (double NNSA's previous estimates). Now this latest JASON report further bolsters the conclusion that

the existing stockpile is safe and reliable. It would be

foolhardy in the extreme to trade experience-borne confidence in the stockpile for speculative future designs that can't be tested, or alternatively could only be tested with self-threatening global proliferation consequences.



The executive summary of the new JASON Report did not directly address three proposed new production plants: **a multi-billion dollar plutonium "Nuclear Facility" at Los Alamos, a "Uranium Processing Facility" at the Y-12 Plant in Tennessee, and a new ~\$660 million Kansas City Plant for nonnuclear components.** However, if Life Extension Programs can maintain nukes indefinitely, as they do now, *without* these new facilities--then clearly we don't need them. All three were conceived

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and initially designed during the Bush Administration's aggressive push for resumed industrial-scale nuclear weapons production, including new designs. NukeWatch still believes the real purpose of these facilities is to expand weapons production for future new designs.

Senate ratification of the Test Ban Treaty should not be corrupted by any mandate to build new nuclear weapons facilities, unless their mission is explicitly redirected toward irreversible dismantlements and secure disposition of nuclear materials.

--Jay Coghlan

For more, please see:

1) Executive summary of JASON Life Extension Programs Report at www.nukewatch.org/facts/nwd/JASON_ReportLEP.pdf

2) Nukewatch article **Labs Seek Stockpile Modernization Through Test Ban Ratification** at www.nukewatch.org/facts/nwd/NWNM_PR_CTBT_Safeguards_090409.pdf

PLUTONIUM CENTER OF NEGLIGENCE

The U.S. Energy Department has designated Los Alamos National Laboratory the "Plutonium Center of Excellence" for the nuclear weapons complex.

In October, the independent Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB) reported its concerns about potential consequences of seismic events at LANL's Plutonium Facility. The Board declared, **"Given the magnitude of the potential consequences to the public... DOE must develop expeditiously a defensible safety strategy for seismically induced events at the Plutonium Facility and a credible plan for implementing this strategy. DOE's response must include definite, measurable, and immediate means to substantially reduce the potential consequences at the site boundary. Implementation of a sound safety strategy must be pursued on an urgent basis."** In the worst case, an earthquake-caused fire could emit enough plutonium to deliver a lethal dose to a person on the facility's perimeter.

The Board has long pushed for active confinement of any seismically-induced fire and smoke. This would include both controlling exhaust fans and turning on sprinklers for filters. The Lab argues for passive confinement, akin to the last person leaving the burning facility making sure they close the door. DNFSB found the Lab's current safety strategy flawed and again called for an active confinement ventilation system.

Ten years late, after first required, the Lab finally updated an operational safety document for the Plutonium Facility that identifies planned future safety upgrades. However, the Board stated that this document relies on seismic safety upgrades that won't be implemented for many years, and in any event would be insufficient to address some seismic scenarios. DNFSB, which unfortunately has no enforcement power, could only make recommendations, to which the Lab has not yet responded.



The Plutonium Facility is currently in stand-down mode, due to repeated failures of the fire suppression system. This is shocking, in light of the 2004 Lab-wide stand-down, which cost taxpayers over \$350 million and was supposed to resolve all safety/security issues at that time, but clearly didn't.

These events are merely the latest in a long series of plutonium problems at the Lab, including:

- Water coolant baths for plutonium Pu-238 were not monitored on a regular basis, raising the possibility that heat from the plutonium would boil off the water, leading in turn to a potential catastrophe which could have released high doses to the public.
- Planning and work controls inconsistent with DOE's own internal requirements.
- No functional verification for many of the recent mandated safety upgrades.

In November the Lab announced a plan to develop a "plutonium science strategy" aimed at providing a roadmap for Lab-wide operations. This would include an assessment of LANL's core plutonium capabilities. The plan won't be completed until mid-2011. **How can Los Alamos already be a Center of Excellence if it does not yet know what its core capabilities are?** The plan also calls for formulating an investment strategy, but spending on upgrades apparently is not a priority. If past history is any guide, repairs will come only after profits have already been assured.

The Lab has long been negligent in maintaining its flagship existing plutonium facility. It has not been a good steward of plutonium missions. Yet it plans to build a huge new "Nuclear Facility" for plutonium. How can \$2 billion (and counting) be available for a new super-facility while the existing one lacks funds for necessary safety upgrades? Money for this new facility must not be considered until the Lab makes all safety upgrades to the existing facility--and the upgrades are verified safe to protect the public.

--Scott Kovac

Calendar of Upcoming Dates of Importance

February 2010: Release of Obama Administration's "**Nuclear Posture Review.**" Will it reflect the President's declared goal of eliminating nuclear weapons? Stay tuned for NukeWatch analysis and comment.

Feb. 1: Rollout of the **Department of Energy's budget for FY 2011**, which includes nuclear weapons programs, cleanup, and Los Alamos and Sandia Labs' budgets. Again, stay tuned for NukeWatch analysis and comment.

February (probably?): The new **Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with Russia** goes to the Senate for ratification.

March: President Obama will host an **international nuclear security summit**.

March 14 to 17: Alliance for Nuclear Accountability "**DC Days,**" when NukeWatch and 30 other member organizations work together to educate Congress on nuclear weapons and cleanup issues.

Spring 2010: Planned **groundbreaking by private investors of a new "Kansas City Plant"** for production of 85% of all future nuclear weapons components, ironically shortly before the NonProliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference (see below). NukeWatch will help to organize citizen opposition to that groundbreaking.

May 2: International **citizens' demonstration for nuclear weapons abolition** near the United Nations in NYC.

May 3 to 28: United Nations **NPT Review Conference**, at which non-weapons states are expected to demand that the nuclear powers begin honoring their 1970 Treaty obligation to disarm. NukeWatch will be there May 2 to 7.

Sometime in 2010 or 2011: the **Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty** goes to the Senate for ratification. NukeWatch will be fighting against likely political deals linking Test Ban ratification to new weapons research and production facilities (see page 1 article).

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mission statement

Through comprehensive research, public education and effective citizen action, **Nuclear Watch New Mexico** seeks to promote safety and environmental protection; diversification away from nuclear weapons programs; greater accountability and cleanup in the nation-wide nuclear weapons complex; and consistent U.S. leadership toward a world free of nuclear weapons.

***In This Issue: Los Alamos Plutonium Center of Excellence--or Negligence?
New Bomb Plants Aren't Needed and Don't Match that Shiny New Nobel Peace Prize;
2010 Policy Events Calendar: A Promising Year for Nuclear Weapons Issues***

b o n e s , p l e a s e

Yep, it's that time of year again. Time to make end-of-year donations to your favorite non-profits, all while you cleverly juggle holiday (and living) expenses in a lousy economy. We know all too well. Help us out as much as you can and we promise we will earn every penny of it advocating for you, the public.

Don't forget, you can lower your taxes while you reduce the nuclear threat to our planet and loved ones. All in all, a pretty good deal when you think about it.

Thank you, friends.



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